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Operational activities for development: triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system

Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system: conclusions and recommendations

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report is submitted in compliance with paragraph 96 of General Assembly resolution 56/201, in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of that resolution, including appropriate recommendations.

The report gives a synopsis of the detailed analysis of the implementation of resolution 56/201 contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system (A/59/85-E/2004/68), which focused on the assessment of the capacity of the United Nations development system to assist developing countries in pursuing poverty eradication, economic growth and sustainable development in the context of the follow-up to the United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2) and major United Nations conferences and summits (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2003/3, para. 37).

* The present report was submitted after the expiration of the deadlines for submission of the report to the General Assembly in order to complete the necessary consultations with the funds, programmes, specialized agencies and other entities of the United Nations system following the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council in July 2004.

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The present report takes into account the views and comments of Member States at the operational activities segment of the substantive session of 2004 of the Council (see Council resolution 2004/5, para. 1), as well as additional information provided by system organizations. It is complemented by the report of the Secretary-General on the comprehensive statistical data on operational activities for development for the year 2002 (A/59/84-E/2004/53) and the preliminary statistical data for the year 2003 (A/59/386), and three conference room papers submitted to the Economic and Social Council in July 2004 (E/2004/CRP.7, 9 and 10). It takes into account the report of the Secretary-General (E/2004/60) on assessment of the value added of the joint meetings of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Food Programme (see Council resolution 2003/3, para. 28) and provides an overall analysis of progress on reform measures undertaken by the Secretary-General in 1997 (see A/51/950, Action 10) and 2002 (see A/57/387, in particular Actions 14 and 15), as regards the development cooperation of the United Nations system.

The report calls for a number of actions that aim at enhancing the effectiveness of the United Nations system development cooperation, strengthening coherence within a unified, nationally-owned development framework, ensuring adequate use of all relevant capacities available in the system, placing greater emphasis on results and their evaluation, and translating internationally agreed development goals into national terms. It calls for adequate funding and further reflection on funding arrangements, and for organizational and structural changes, including strengthening of the resident coordinator system. The system's country-level presence should be responsive to national priorities and needs, ensuring comprehensive support to dimensions that are key to a sustained and sustainable development effort. Intensified field-level coordination and participation of all relevant parts of the system, including those entities that do not have country-level representation, are essential. Greater consideration should be given to the regional dimensions of the system's development cooperation and to developing national capacities, as one of its key functions. Added emphasis should be placed on gender mainstreaming.

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I. Overview of United Nations development cooperation issues

1. The role of the United Nations system in development cooperation is at a pivotal juncture. As the international community prepares itself for a turning point in the effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, the question to be addressed is whether the system is equipped and organized to play its role fully, through its operational work, in this undertaking.

2. While the strategic value of that role may be better captured by its catalytic and advocacy functions than by the scale of its activities, its credibility also depends on its relevance to country needs, which, in turn, is determined by the volume and the quality of the resources it is able to deploy to support national development strategies.

3. A key challenge at this juncture is to achieve a disciplined alignment of the system's development cooperation activities behind a well-rooted national development strategy, broadly owned at the country level and designed to realize internationally agreed goals. This implies the promotion of, and adherence to, a comprehensive, integrated and multidimensional approach to development, where economic, social, environmental and humanitarian factors, and the promotion of universally shared ethical values, such as equity, justice, participatory development, respect for human rights and attention to the most vulnerable social groups are pursued as integral components of United Nations system efforts aimed at building stable, peaceful and sustainable conditions for economic progress and social development.

4. Overall, the deliberations of the Economic and Social Council in July 2004 indicated a broad recognition and appreciation of the significant progress that the system has made in implementing reforms and of their contribution to enhancing United Nations system coordination, coherence and effectiveness in supporting national development efforts, within the overall framework of the Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2) and the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the development goals agreed at relevant global conferences, summits and international conventions. Efforts to align analytical and planning tools with national and international priorities, advance simplification and harmonization, introduce results-based planning, strengthen the resident coordinator system and develop robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are beginning to bear fruit in making the system more effective and results-oriented.

5. At the same time, there was a clear sense that this effort had not, as yet, drawn as fully as desired on the system as a whole, particularly agencies, programmes, regional commissions and other United Nations entities without field presence. The system moves at varying speeds in participating in, and contributing to, a coordinated country-level response to country needs. There was also an equally strong sense that much remains to be done to further shift the focus on reforms from process to results.

6. Key issues highlighted by the Council included: (a) the impact of the field-level capacity of both the United Nations system and its national counterparts on the effectiveness of United Nations system development cooperation; (b) the financial structure underpinning United Nations system operational activities for development; (c) its implication for United Nations system performance; (d) new funding trends and the proliferation of global funds and their implications for the

system; (e) system governance at the country and global levels; (f) policy coherence, coordination, coherence and complementarity of analytical frameworks, such as the common country assessment, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) and poverty reduction strategies; (g) the need for a unified development framework; and (h) national ownership and leadership of the development process.

7. The internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, were seen to provide a common and unifying framework for bringing about a qualitative shift in the coordination effort, from improving processes to producing measurable results. The United Nations was perceived as being uniquely positioned to help developing countries meet this challenge by integrating the Millennium Development Goals into their own legislation, priorities and targets. For this potential to be fully realized, however, renewed effort is needed to align the United Nations system's own planning to national priorities and goals and to assist countries in providing leadership in the pursuit of their own development goals. Fundamental targets that should be pursued are achieving adequacy in the system's country-level governance, including more flexible country-level structures, innovative and flexible funding and support mechanisms, and a system of incentives and rewards for coordination and cooperation. There is a need to reconsider the coherence of policy guidance provided by governance structures at the global level, including the roles of, and linkages between, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Executive Boards and their joint meetings, and the governing bodies of the specialized agencies.

8. Finally, a fresh and far-reaching reflection was urged on: (a) funding arrangements and alternative financing modalities; (b) adequacy, stability and predictability of the volume and the quality of financial resources for United Nations activities; and (c) achieving a more balanced ratio of core and non-core funding, with a view to ensuring a critical, assured mass of non-earmarked resources that would enable the system to provide credible and sustained support to countries for nationally owned Millennium Development Goals strategies over the long term.

9. For United Nations system development cooperation to be effective, financing for it must be adequate, predictable and stable (see sect. III below), and the system's country-level support must be conceived within a unified framework, in keeping with the Millennium Declaration and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals. It should also be fully integrated and harmonized with national development strategies, so that activities, country-level presence, structures, modalities and programming instruments are fully responsive to national priorities (see sects. IV and V and related recommendations). Such a unified framework would be particularly relevant to transition situations, in which the system's humanitarian work, peace-building activities and long-term development support are complementary (see sect. IX).

10. To effectively relate system development cooperation to national development processes, its interventions should address comprehensively core development goals at the country level and focus on strengthening national capacities in key development functions (see sect. VII), including through gender mainstreaming in system operations (see sect. VIII). Achievement of concrete results should be systematically monitored and evaluated (see sect. II).

11. Maximizing the participation of all relevant parts of the system is essential to enhance system effectiveness and responsiveness to national needs, and it requires the contribution of specialized agencies and other United Nations entities, programmes and regional commissions that do not have country-level representation. Ways should be found to bring into play in a more coherent and comprehensive way the capacities of the entire United Nations system in support of national development (see sects. IV and V below).

12. The recommendations that follow, whether related to specific processes, such as common country assessments and UNDAF, evaluation of United Nations system effectiveness, and harmonization and simplification, or other key dimensions, such as focus on results, gender, national capacities, transition situations and regional dimensions, are designed to promote these outcomes.

II. Effectiveness of United Nations system development cooperation, results and evaluation

13. The assessments for the triennial comprehensive policy review and the Economic and Social Council deliberations have confirmed and have further clarified the unique contribution United Nations system development cooperation can make in helping translate into national terms the global development agenda and the unique assets the system brings to the discharge of this function. There is widespread recognition that the potential contribution of the United Nations system as a source of universal, neutral and grant-based multilateral development assistance and advice, and as a trusted partner in consensus-building among national stakeholders and with other development actors, remains irreplaceable and crucial to engendering sustainable progress. The broad scope of United Nations system multilateral assistance, encompassing economic, social, environmental and humanitarian factors, and inspired by universally shared ethical values, such as equity, justice, participatory development, respect for human rights (see A/57/387, Action 2) and attention to the most vulnerable social groups, continues to be valued as a key component of its unique contribution to development. The United Nations system is also seen to play a crucial role in promoting an integrated and people-centred approach to peace and development.

14. Many countries, particularly in Africa and the least developed countries, face major challenges in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. Expectations about the quantity and the quality of support from United Nations organizations in translating these goals and the vision of the Millennium Declaration into national terms are not being fully met. In spite of all of the assets of the system, its assistance to developing countries is not yet equal to their needs, is not as coherent and comprehensive as it could be and is not wholly aligned with country strategies. Moreover, not all of the system's available capacities are fully utilized, and linkages among interventions relating to the various dimensions of development and between peace and development are not fully articulated operationally.

15. The assessments for this triennial comprehensive policy review and the Economic and Social Council debate in July 2004 have highlighted and welcomed the new focus of international development cooperation on implementation and results, linking effectiveness with the extensive use of results-based management approaches in strategic programming. Efforts to translate the Millennium

Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals into a country-level reality require the strong commitment of the members of the resident coordinator system, to reorient country operations towards a results-based approach in development terms, which includes more intensive use of lessons learned, as possible, through a common system-wide framework that links United Nations development assistance to national objectives, strategies and expected results.

16. The recent introduction of the UNDAF results matrix and the intensification of joint monitoring and evaluation initiatives should facilitate progress towards applying the results-based approach at the system-wide level. Issues such as attribution of results, definition of performance incentives, harmonization of results-based approaches among different organizations of the system and adequacy of databases for a more systematic system-wide use of this approach will require further work, analysis and experimentation, including efforts to promote national evaluation capacities and further use of lessons learned from past United Nations activities.

Recommendations

17. **The General Assembly may wish to:**

(a) Call upon the United Nations system to further strengthen the support it provides to developing countries in meeting internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, on the basis of a coherent system-wide country-level approach responsive to national priorities and aligned with national strategies, including poverty reduction and sector-wide strategies, where available;

(b) Request the United Nations system to ensure that the contribution of all relevant capacities to a coherent system-wide approach, at the country level, is based on a clear articulation of the links between the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development, and between peace-building, conflict prevention and development, and is geared to support efforts in countries in formulating and implementing integrated development strategies;

(c) Underscore that the effectiveness of the United Nations system's operational activities will ultimately be assessed against development results, and request the Secretary-General to continue to assess the effectiveness of the United Nations system's operational activities for development, including in particular assessing the effective use of all capacities available within the system to provide a comprehensive and flexible response to the demand of developing countries for development support, and to report on the results in the context of the next triennial policy review at its sixty-second session;

(d) Request the organizations of the United Nations system to:

(i) Accord high priority to the effective translation of Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals into concrete system-wide development results at the country-level, identifying the expected contribution to progress, reflecting performance accountability as assessed through the appraisal and the evaluation systems of United Nations organizations and making further progress in the implementation of the approaches set out in the relevant UNDAF guidelines;

(ii) Strengthen the evaluation function across the system;

(iii) Promote the systematic use and integration of adequate monitoring and evaluation elements into the United Nations system's operational programmes, including, where appropriate, joint impartial and independent evaluations;

(iv) Involve closely national authorities and civil society in monitoring and evaluating activities to achieve a comprehensive and participatory approach, and systematically apply lessons learned to programming processes.

III. Funding for the United Nations system's development cooperation

18. If the system is to meet international expectations regarding its role in assisting countries to operationalize and implement the Millennium Development Goals within coherent national development strategies, a critical mass of resources should be secured. Moreover, the system is increasingly being called upon to support countries in highly sensitive and complex areas, such as peace-building and conflict prevention, with integrated system-wide responses that place an additional burden on its resources. These demands should not be met at the expense of development cooperation activities. Also, adequate investment in development interventions can prevent huge expenses for peacekeeping operations in the future.

19. The analysis for the triennial comprehensive policy review and the Economic and Social Council debate have reinforced the argument that, if the expected results are to be achieved, reforms at the country level must be accompanied by a substantial and sustained increase of non-earmarked (i.e., core or regular) funding for United Nations system development cooperation. A significantly higher level of effectiveness in delivery and results requires, as a key condition, adequacy, predictability and long-term stability of funding for operational activities for development, with an emphasis on regular/core funding.

20. There is increasing acknowledgement that a key condition for progress is for donor countries and the international community to adopt a more comprehensive and integrated approach to international cooperation funding, ensuring that the financing of the United Nations system's development cooperation is no longer considered independently from international development cooperation and that it is an integral part of it, in particular of multilateral cooperation financing. More comprehensive and comparative information on United Nations development cooperation and other forms of multilateral development cooperation in the context of overall funding of international development cooperation needs to be assembled.

21. As part of this effort, the objective of diversifying and broadening the donor base, including through increasing involvement of countries with emerging economies, should be actively pursued.

22. Regarding the annual United Nations Pledging Conference for Development Activities, the Secretary-General submitted alternative options to the current modality of the Conference, including a regular pledging event, in his report (A/57/332), as requested by the General Assembly in paragraph 26 of its resolution

56/201. The Assembly decided to further review this issue at the 2004 triennial comprehensive policy review.

23. The overall funding structure of United Nations system development cooperation should be reviewed in the light of the new demands being placed on it, taking into account the funding modalities adopted by each organization. There is widespread recognition that, although there are no easy solutions in this domain, a renewed and targeted dialogue among Member States to identify new avenues of collaboration and innovations in funding for United Nations development cooperation should be pursued in a spirit of partnership.

24. Early and concrete progress in this area is critical to the role that the system is expected to play to advance the Millennium Development Goals, as well as in emergency and transition situations, and requires serious consideration at the intergovernmental level. In providing oversight of United Nations system development cooperation, the operational activities segment of the Economic and Social Council could focus on concrete suggestions for actions in the context of the Monterrey commitments on multilateral cooperation funding and, in general, financing for development, giving special consideration to new funding modalities.

Recommendations

25. **The General Assembly may wish to:**

(a) **Reiterate its call on all developed countries to take concrete steps towards reaching the United Nations target of providing official development assistance at the level of 0.7 per cent of gross national product as soon as possible;**

(b) **Call upon all donor countries and countries in a position to do so, including countries with emerging economies, to substantially increase their contributions to the core/regular budgets of United Nations system organizations, wherever possible, on a multi-year basis;**

(c) **Call for further exploration of additional sources of funding for the United Nations system's development cooperation activities;**

(d) **Invite intergovernmental bodies of individual organizations of the United Nations development system to address systematically the funding of their operational activities;**

(e) **Request the Economic and Social Council to undertake a comprehensive review of major trends in and perspectives on funding for United Nations system development cooperation in the context of international development cooperation as a whole and its multilateral components.**

26. **In the same context, the Assembly may also wish to request the Council to establish an intergovernmental working group to examine, in the light of the changed development dynamics and challenges that internationally agreed goals present, ways to enhance the predictability, stability and adequacy of United Nations system funding, including through new funding mechanisms, while preserving the advantages of the current funding modalities.**

IV. Field-level coordination and integration with national development processes

27. The analysis for this triennial comprehensive policy review, including country-level assessments, and the Economic and Social Council debate confirm the importance that continues to be attached to progress in field-level coordination of United Nations development cooperation; i.e., the ability to provide coherent and well-coordinated support to country strategies.

28. Field-level coordination should not be limited to United Nations system activities, but should encompass the entire range of international assistance to a country, including activities of other multilateral institutions and bilateral donors. The United Nations development system's support to national comprehensive development strategies will produce significant results to the extent that it effectively matches national needs and priorities. Full integration of United Nations system activities with country-level efforts, under Government leadership, should be the ultimate goal of the international development community.

29. This implies that: (a) responsiveness to country needs should become a key factor in shaping United Nations system operations; (b) the capacity of the United Nations development system to deliver tangible and sustainable development results should be enhanced through the explicit inclusion of results-based management in programming those activities; and (c) active contribution to development should effectively interact and be integrated with a large variety of development efforts, both domestic and international, including those that are not aid-related or are funded with non-concessional resources.

30. Enhancing national ownership and leadership in United Nations processes such as the common country assessment and UNDAF continues to be a key objective. The need to integrate the common country assessment and UNDAF with national planning and programming processes, and ensuring their harmonization with exercises such as national poverty reduction strategies and sector-wide frameworks, where they exist, is of paramount importance. In this respect, the United Nations Development Group guidelines need to be fully operationalized.

31. The common country assessment and UNDAF have been instrumental in achieving greater country-level programmatic coherence and efficiency within the system. The evaluation of these two instruments has shown significant progress in terms of their quality and alignment with national frameworks, particularly the poverty reduction strategies in the context of achieving the Millennium Development Goals, and their impact on coherence of United Nations system development cooperation. Teamwork among the system organizations, particularly those represented at the country level, has improved as a consequence of these processes, allowing for wider involvement of national stakeholders and United Nations agencies, although participation is not even.

32. In the course of reforms, new simplification and harmonization tools have produced qualitative improvements, particularly in programming activities. Among these tools are the recently introduced UNDAF results matrix and measures to facilitate joint programming. The full potential and value added of these instruments, however, have yet to be realized.

33. The implementation of reform programmes, new system-wide instruments, guidelines adopted by the United Nations Development Group and other measures aimed at harmonizing policies and procedures and enhancing field-level programming coherence require continued efforts to ensure that the resources of United Nations organizations and national stakeholders in the area of development cooperation focus on actual implementation of development activities and on results.

34. Reform measures have not yet generated overall simplification of processes. Further progress is required to harmonize the United Nations development system's country programming, in order to reduce the transaction costs associated with more intensive coordination. At the same time, individual organizations that have adopted harmonized procedures and new common tools tend to retain their own administrative procedural requirements.

35. Although these new tools have been adopted by all the members of the United Nations Development Group, their use by different parts of the system and generally in field-level coordination mechanisms is uneven. Contributing to this situation are the various programming systems for country-level operations, the harmonized multi-year country programmes — a feature shared by the United Nations Development Group Executive Committee agencies — and the fact that a number of organizations do not have country-level representation (see sect. V).

36. Gaps in field-level coordination need to be filled by the full participation of all funds, programmes, agencies and other entities of the United Nations system, including the regional commissions, in processes that aim at intensifying field-level coordination of operational activities for development. This greater participation should be geared to providing a more comprehensive and coherent response to national needs and priorities and to bringing more fully to bear the overall capacities of the United Nations system in assisting developing countries to effectively translate internationally agreed development goals at the country level.

37. The resident coordinator system is the principal vehicle for United Nations system field-level coordination and is a key instrument for organizing a coherent response to country needs and priorities, as, in principle, it includes, in addition to the member organizations of the United Nations country team, organizations or entities with no country representation. Ongoing efforts to improve selection and enhance training and performance of individual resident coordinators have led to definite progress. There is nevertheless room for further improvement in strengthening the performance of the resident coordinator system, especially as a collegial mechanism, requiring more effective and broader participation of United Nations organizations.

38. In order to enhance its capacity to develop a coordinated and coherent response to national needs, and to provide recipient countries with more timely, flexible and relevant substantive support, the resident coordinator system should be strengthened by: (a) enhancing the leadership and the competencies of the resident coordinator; (b) providing the resident coordinator with additional resources and support; and (c) creating incentives to attract the best possible candidates system-wide for the resident coordinator position.

39. Consideration is being given within the United Nations Development Group to the feasibility of attributing additional formal authority to the resident coordinator,

to be matched with increased accountability (e.g., in the development and the implementation of the UNDAF results matrix, where the resident coordinator is expected to take direct responsibility for implementing a system-wide results-based approach through this mechanism).

Recommendations

40. **The General Assembly may wish to invite governing bodies of United Nations organizations, particularly those with country-level operations (and their respective management), to give further consideration to adopting the organizational and the structural changes required to facilitate participation of their respective organizations in field-level coordination mechanisms, their alignment with national processes and harmonization and simplification measures, with a view to further intensifying:**

(a) **Harmonization of planning and programming modalities with national priorities and alignment of country-level operations with national priorities and strategic frameworks, including poverty reduction strategies and sector-wide frameworks, under Government leadership and involving civil society and the private sector;**

(b) **Progress in such areas as decentralization, the delegation of authority, delivery and financial regulations, personnel use and allocation, the sharing of services and premises;**

(c) **Reduction of administrative and procedural efforts for United Nations system organizations and national partners by streamlining procedures, alleviating the burden of reporting and reducing transaction costs.**

41. **The General Assembly may also wish to call upon organizations of the system to deploy further efforts and resources to support the Office of the Resident Coordinator to make the resident coordinator system more effective and representative of the totality of the system's capacity.**

V. Country-level capacity of the United Nations system

42. A long-standing principle, repeatedly stressed by the General Assembly, is that the United Nations system should be responsive to national priorities, and its presence in the field should be tailored, taking into account the views of the recipient government, to the country's specific development needs.[1] One of the important elements of the triennial comprehensive policy review discussion in the Economic and Social Council was the need to reconsider how the capacities of the United Nations system are deployed and used at the country level and how the vast knowledge and expertise available in the system can be fully tapped.

43. A more comprehensive system-wide involvement in the overall effort to support developing countries should be ensured, making better use of the contribution of some specialized agencies, regional commissions and other United Nations entities with no country representation or limited country-level presence, and the organizational and the substantive specificity of each organization, to the country analysis and development cooperation strategy of the United Nations system as a whole, among other uses.

44. The system has made concerted efforts to respond to the changing needs of countries, but the effectiveness of these efforts is constrained by several institutional and organizational factors. Even in relation to organizations with country offices, pooling resources and expertise is difficult to practice due to differences in mandates, institutional structures, policies, administrative systems, programming and funding modalities, and available financial and technical resources. It is all the more complex in relation to organizations not present at the country level. Devising approaches and mechanisms to overcome existing constraints and to enable countries to draw on their capacities, which often relate to key dimensions of the development process, should be given focused attention in the period ahead, ensuring that United Nations system support to development includes all dimensions that are key to a sustained and sustainable development effort and responds to the changing demands that developing countries place on the United Nations system.

45. This requires more comprehensive common country assessments and UNDAFs, where the comparative advantage of the system as a whole and the overall development strategy of the country should be duly reflected. Although the focused approach to a few core development themes or priorities recently adopted in the common country assessment and UNDAF processes is intended to increase the effectiveness of United Nations system collective action, the strategic orientation of those themes and priorities should be aligned with, and should encompass, the broad structure of development needs and priorities. While it may not be feasible to integrate in these system-wide processes all the individual contributions of United Nations organizations to national development, especially in the case of highly specialized technical interventions that do not need to be integrated into "core" development strategies, a wider and more in-depth contribution from the United Nations system to the common country assessment and UNDAF will enhance the system capacity to support countries in addressing the complexities of the development process.

46. Constraints to providing a more adequate response from the system arise, primarily from the current state of field representation. Country-level representation by individual organizations largely responds to organization-specific considerations, rather than to system-wide assessments of the requirements of United Nations system development cooperation or of the priority requirements for development assistance of individual developing countries. The United Nations country team, for its part, is not necessarily engaged in the broader interactions that countries have with the system as a whole.

47. Not every organization can have field presence, yet such presence should reflect the substantive requirements of development cooperation. A number of organizations that have the most direct responsibility for sectors crucial to development, such as employment, economic management, rural development, human settlements and urbanization, environment and trade, do not have the mandate and resources to provide a decentralized presence based on a network of country offices.

48. Ways and means should be devised for fuller and more effective country-level use of the knowledge and the expertise available in the specialized agencies with no field presence, as well as in such entities as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the regional commissions,[2] the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and

the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), bolstering the system's capacity to support national efforts at comprehensive development policy formulation and implementation and avoiding the replication of similar service functions provided by several organizations in the same country.

49. Further rationalization of the system's field presence can be pursued in several ways, such as by identifying more systematically options to station substantive personnel or antennas of organizations with no field representation within country or regional offices of other organizations or within the resident coordinator office in response to specific requirements.

Recommendations

50. **The General Assembly may wish to request the organizations of the United Nations system, individually and collectively, to enhance the effectiveness of the system's presence at the country level, whether with country offices, networks of international support, including from headquarters and regional offices, or other flexible inter-agency arrangements, to ensure that the United Nations system's development support brings in all dimensions, and related factors, that are key to a sustained and sustainable development effort. The aim should be to:**

(a) **Improve and strengthen the capacity of the United Nations system to respond to country needs and priorities, in keeping with General Assembly resolutions 44/211 and 47/199;**

(b) **Ensure more effective and broader involvement of all United Nations system organizations, including non-resident agencies, programmes, regional commissions and other non-resident United Nations entities, in the resident coordinator system and system-wide activities and mechanisms at the country level;**

(c) **Intensify country-level collaboration by pooling resources and sharing capacities and skills of field offices;**

(d) **Develop system knowledge networks and communities of practice to harness more effectively expertise and knowledge available throughout the system, which remain underutilized at the country level, ensuring mutual access and referral services of all parts of the United Nations system for national authorities and their development partners.**

51. **In the same context, the Assembly may wish to invite non-resident entities of the United Nations system, including regional commissions, to enter into inter-agency partnership with other relevant United Nations organizations to ensure better integration of their potential contribution into country-level programming of operational activities so that the relevant dimensions of country-level development challenges are addressed in line with the comparative advantages and expertise of the various organizations of the system.**

52. **The General Assembly may wish to also urge the engagement of all relevant organizations of the United Nations system, including those without country representation, in wider and more substantive participation in the common country assessment and UNDAF processes, encouraging them to use**

UNDAF as the overall framework for their country programming exercises, including through appropriate knowledge networks and other relevant forms of inter-agency collaboration.

VI. Regional dimensions

53. Notwithstanding the prevailing country focus of United Nations development cooperation and the country-based character of the resident coordinator system and associated coordination tools and modalities, regional dimensions are acquiring growing importance in this context. Many development challenges can be best addressed at the regional or subregional level and/or through lessons learned at those levels. There are opportunities for multilateral activities that call for transboundary approaches or are better defined at the regional level in areas such as cross-border investment, infrastructure, transport, the effective use of energy and water sources, environmental protection, the prevention and cure of epidemics and endemic health problems, trade opportunities, labour movements, technological innovations, natural disaster mitigation and mutual solidarity in crisis situations. There are indeed several normative, analytical and technical cooperation aspects of the work of the United Nations system that can be most effectively addressed at the regional and subregional levels, where appropriate solutions to problems are more easily found and better defined.

54. Intensified regional cooperation could also open new avenues to technical cooperation among developing countries. The growing technical capacity of the United Nations system at the regional and subregional levels offers cost-effective support to development processes, including by stimulating technical cooperation among developing countries.

55. In addition to possessing a substantial pool of knowledge and technical capacity, the regional commissions play a central role in the regional implementation and follow-up to global development agendas, and facilitate intercountry exchange of experience and promote interregional cooperation.

56. Several agencies of the system (e.g. the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Food Programme) show a growing tendency to decentralize organizational structures, with intended cost savings, and to provide substantive, technical and managerial support to country-level operations from regional and subregional offices, especially in such areas as service delivery, programme support, policy advice, monitoring and evaluation. While this is a common trend, regional structures continue to be defined with different geographical coverage and regional offices have different locations.

57. In response to this trend, attention should be given to better integrating regional dimensions in the programme frameworks or individual programmes and projects supported by the United Nations system at the country level. Information on intercountry activities within the resident coordinator system is not always sufficiently developed, easily available or accessible. Effective use of intercountry and regional cooperation, and the resulting economies of scale, is still not adequate. There is a need for improved information exchange on intercountry activities within

the resident coordinator system, and improved mechanisms for accessing the technical capacities of the United Nations at the regional and subregional levels, including those available in the regional commissions.

58. The growing significance of regional and subregional dimensions of development cooperation within the United Nations system should be reflected in measures that better capture these dimensions in planning and programming instruments and strengthen inter-agency collaboration to this effect. More generally, it is important to bring greater coherence and effectiveness to the regional work of the United Nations system as a whole on development issues. To this end, more effective use should be made of the coordination mechanism established under the aegis of the regional commissions within the framework of Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46.

Recommendation

59. **The General Assembly may wish to:**

(a) **Call upon the organizations of the system and the regional commissions to intensify their cooperation and adopt more collaborative approaches in mobilizing regional support to country-level development initiatives;**

(b) **Invite the governing bodies of the organizations of the system to give greater and more systematic consideration to the regional dimensions of development cooperation and to promote measures for more intensive inter-agency collaboration at the regional and subregional levels, including through increasing harmonization of their regional structures among themselves and with the regional commissions;**

(c) **Request the resident coordinator system and its member organizations to pay more attention to regional dimensions of operational activities for development, in close collaboration with the regional commissions and other regional entities.**

VII. Capacity-building

60. National capacity-building is a central purpose of the United Nations system's operational activities. However, assessments conducted in different parts of the system have pointed to weaknesses that continue to exist in this domain. United Nations organizations should pursue in a determined way several key actions, including: (a) further elaborating a shared understanding of the parameters and approaches to capacity development; and (b) articulating more explicitly in all programmes the operational implications of capacity-building and its sustainability as a goal of technical assistance.

61. In this context, the United Nations system should encourage initiatives that, while pursuing the enhancement of United Nations staff skills in system-wide results-based management, deliberately aim at strengthening those capacities among nationals from the recipient country, through improved training and the use of appraisal and reward systems, so that programming capacities and capacities for implementing national development policies are further enhanced. In this regard, it would be useful for the General Assembly to reiterate that the development of

national capacity is a key consideration in defining the contents and the objectives of United Nations system development cooperation, calling upon United Nations organizations to promote or follow up their review of approaches to national capacity-building with concrete initiatives.

62. The promotion of cooperation among developing countries — South-South cooperation — is an indirect but potentially very valuable contribution to the development of national capacities in developing countries, allowing for better use of their capacities beyond national borders. It should be regarded as a critical dimension of United Nations system development cooperation. Although many United Nations organizations have policies and/or programmes of support for South-South cooperation, that potential remains underutilized. The Assembly may urge United Nations organizations to promote more actively South-South cooperation.

Recommendations

63. **The General Assembly may wish to stress the importance of national capacity-building as a central goal of United Nations system development cooperation, calling upon its organizations in particular to:**

(a) **Provide further support to the efforts of developing countries to establish and/or maintain effective national planning institutions and devise national strategies for capacity-building in the pursuit of internationally agreed development goals;**

(b) **Adopt measures that ensure the sustainability of capacity-building activities, including further development of national execution modalities to maximize support for national capacity development.**

64. **The General Assembly may also wish to urge organizations and bodies of the United Nations system to mainstream, in their programmes, country-level activities and country offices, modalities to support South-South cooperation that will promote the dissemination of good practices in this field, promote indigenous knowledge, know-how and technology in the South, facilitate networking among experts and institutions in developing countries and, in general, catalyse South-South cooperation.**

VIII. Gender mainstreaming in operational activities

65. Gender equality is not only one of the Millennium Development Goals, it is also recognized as a vital means for achieving the other Millennium Development Goals. In the Economic and Social Council deliberations on the triennial comprehensive policy review, the general trend of mainstreaming gender perspectives and addressing gender issues in operational activities and in humanitarian operations was welcomed.

66. The common country assessment and UNDAF represent instruments that should play a key role in bringing forward the gender perspective into country-level programmes. The role of the gender theme groups, when they function effectively and are given adequate support, has been key to this progress. However, significant gaps remain. Progress in integrating gender perspectives in United Nations system operational activities has been mainly the result of efforts by individual staff members and experts, rather than of clearly articulated general organizational

priorities. Visible results of gender mainstreaming remain weak, as links between gender equality goals and women's empowerment and sector and programme goals and outcomes are not well established. Gender perspectives tend to be restricted to a few sectors (mainly education and health), and are weak in other sectors, such as economic development, environment and infrastructure. Inadequate sex-disaggregation of statistics remains a major challenge to conducting in-depth gender-related analytical work, including reporting on the internationally agreed goals. Analytical capacities and monitoring mechanisms within the United Nations system on gender are also inadequate.

67. Stronger commitment and accountability, both at the highest level of all United Nations system organizations and at the field level, are desirable to achieve more visible results in the areas of gender equality and the empowerment of women, and to further strengthen United Nations system capacity in mainstreaming gender in all areas of development cooperation, including in developing national capacities.

Recommendation

68. **The General Assembly may wish to:**

(a) **Call upon all organizations of the United Nations system to articulate specific goals and targets to be pursued within their organizational mandates in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women, including gender mainstreaming in their country programmes, planning instruments and sector-wide programmes, with specific outcomes to be achieved at the country level, and to establish clear accountability measures for monitoring results;**

(b) **Urge the resident coordinator system to collaborate, working closely with relevant national counterparts and other development partners, on generating sex-disaggregated statistics in support of more in-depth analysis of gender-related issues of development, gender-responsive programming and reporting on progress in gender dimensions in the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed goals;**

(c) **Call upon all organizations of the United Nations system to collaborate, through the resident coordination system, on providing and mobilizing gender specialist resources, in support of gender mainstreaming in country-level activities in all sectors where they may be required.**

IX. Operational activities for development of the United Nations system in countries in transition from crisis to development

69. Peace and security are closely intertwined with development, and the sustainability of one is linked to the other. Conflict and its aftermath present enormous impediments to human rights and sustainable development and to progress in implementing the Millennium Development Goals. Situations of transition from conflict to development present opportunities to recover lost ground, but pose complex challenges. In transitional situations, the boundaries between development cooperation, conflict prevention, humanitarian assistance and crisis management are often blurred and, therefore, a comprehensive and integrated approach is needed. It is also recognized that timely and adequate investment in

post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction has tremendous pay-offs in averting relapse into conflict.

70. The United Nations system has a vital role to play in the area of transition. It is uniquely placed to deal with the broad and complex issues of transition from relief to development, given its broad mandate encompassing peace and development, its global presence, its expertise in post-conflict situations, its ability to intervene at short notice and its international legitimacy, which is particularly important in situations where Government capacities are weak.

71. In order to better respond to increased demands, the United Nations system has taken measures to strengthen interdepartmental and inter-agency coordination to promote an integrated approach to peace-building and conflict prevention. However, this has to be further deepened through a better understanding of the country-specific character of transition issues, the identification of strategic interventions, their sequencing and consensus-building around them, leading to more coherent, coordinated and harmonized inter-agency assistance at the country level.

72. In this regard, there is a need to provide more systematic support to strengthen the capacity of the resident coordinator/humanitarian coordinator, and to improve staff skills in areas such as strategic planning, situation analysis and needs assessment, governance, human rights and humanitarian action. The United Nations Development Group/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs Working Group on Transition Issues is actively working on measures to promote and support an integrated approach to transition issues across the system, including tools such as post-conflict needs assessments.

73. Post-conflict recovery programmes, including comprehensive demobilization, disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants, the rehabilitation and reintegration of internally displaced populations and the rebuilding of crucial sectors, such as the judicial and security sectors, are vital to transition. Promoting national capacity-building and ownership in managing post-conflict programmes are key to their success. In most transition situations a gap exists between assessed needs, resource commitments and actual resource flows, as well as their timeliness. As such, the level and the timing of resources made available is a critical factor of success or failure. Member States need to address these issues and devise appropriate modalities for channelling adequate, predictable and timely funding, not only for humanitarian assistance but also for critical transitional activities for longer-term development needs.

74. A stronger commitment from Member States to assist countries in transition through adequate and timely support for critical interventions during transition is urgently required, with a view to sustaining their recovery and long-term development. Further improvements in mechanisms adopted by the United Nations system to support coordinated field-level operations are also necessary in transition countries to promote a comprehensive and integrated approach to post-conflict assistance for peace-building and longer term development.

Recommendation

75. **The General Assembly may wish to:**

(a) **Urge Member States to consider more coordinated and flexible approaches to funding for recovery from conflict, building on the experience of**

the use of multiple resource mobilization instruments such as the inter-agency Consolidated Appeals Process, dedicated donor conferences, the consultative group mechanism and round tables for financing unified United Nations strategic plans for transition, and taking into account other resources made available through assessed contributions to peace and security missions, stressing the need for adequacy and timeliness;

(b) Acknowledge the regional and subregional dimensions of post-conflict peace-building because of the subregional nature of most conflicts, especially in Africa;

(c) Call on the humanitarian, development and political arms of the United Nations system, both at the global and the regional levels, to take further measures to improve coordination and provide more coherent support to field-level operations, within the framework of a comprehensive and integrated approach, clarifying their respective roles, adopting common country strategies, making flexible use of common needs assessment, and programming tools and simplifying procedures for the delivery of assistance;

(d) Call upon all organizations of the United Nations system operating at the country level to promote national ownership and build national capacities for managing transition processes and implementing post-conflict recovery and long-term development programmes.

Notes

[1] See General Assembly resolution 47/199; see also General Assembly resolution 44/211 in which the Assembly emphasized that the range and quantity of skills and expertise assembled by the United Nations system at the country level, under the team leadership of the resident coordinator, should correspond to the multisectoral and sectoral technical backstopping needs and requirements of developing countries and should be within the framework of the respective government programme of cooperation of the United Nations system, rather than to the institutional structure of the United Nations system.

[2] Issues relating more particularly to the regional commissions are addressed in section VI below.